

9 Ideology Against Language

The Current Situation in South Slavic Countries

Snježana Kordić

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a European convention for the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities. Together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, it constitutes the Council of Europe's legal mechanism for protecting national minorities (The European Charter 2019). The Charter was adopted as a convention in June 1992 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and opened for signature in Strasbourg in November 1992. It entered into force in March 1998 (The European Charter 2019). The Charter says that contracting States shall base their policies, legislation and practice on some objectives and principles, which in the field of education include 'the provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of regional or minority languages at all appropriate stages', that is, in pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, university and other higher education (The European Charter 1992).

The Charter defines a regional or minority language in Article 1 as follows:

regional or minority languages means languages that are: i) traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and ii) different from the official language(s) of that State; it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants.

(The European Charter 1992)

According to the above definition, the languages of an American English-speaking minority in Britain and an Austrian German-speaking minority in Germany would not be regarded as minority languages because a minority language does not include dialects (or other varieties) of the official language as they are not different enough from the official language(s) of the State. The Charter has been ratified by 25 European states, including Croatia (1997) and Serbia (2006) (Chart of Signatures 2019).

The Case of Croatia

In the Croatian Constitution, 22 national minorities are explicitly enumerated and recognized, among which are Italians, Hungarians, Germans and Bosniaks, Montenegrins and Serbs (Ustav Republike Hrvatske 2019). Croatia requires 33% of the minority population in certain local government units for obligatory introduction of official use of minority languages. There are about 20 explicitly recognized minority languages, among which are Italian, Hungarian, German and Bosnian, Montenegrin and Serbian.¹

Yet there is a language problem, whose roots go back to the 1990s. In the 1990s, Bosniaks, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs were at war with each other, when their common state Yugoslavia dissolved. Even now, many years after the end of the war, distrust and nationalism continue to persist among them. It affects their relationship to language, especially because in the early 1990s, under the influence of nationalism, many South Slavic linguists began to argue that each nation must have its own language, and if there are any language differences so that one can tell where a person comes from, it is a different language despite being completely intelligible. These claims are, of course, incorrect, which is well known from the linguistic situation of English-speaking or German-speaking nations and countries. The existence of such claims among linguists is an example of ‘politicisation of language and also of linguistics and philology, which were expected to fortify the nations and their nation-states than rather to lend themselves to objective research’ (Kamusella 2001: 235).

Differences in the standard language between Bosniaks, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs are less significant than those between the variants of English, German, Dutch or Hindu-Urdu (McLennan 1996: 107; Pohl 1996: 219; Gröschel 2003: 180–181; Thomas 2003: 314, 318; Blum 2002: 125–126). Consequently, the mutual intelligibility between their speakers ‘exceeds that between the standard variants of English, French, German, or Spanish’ (Thomas 2003: 325). Even if the existing mutual intelligibility is not taken into account, ‘an examination of all the major ‘levels’ of language shows that BCS is clearly a single language’ (Bailyn 2010: 190–191). Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis of lexical layers of identity reveals that ‘lexical differences between the ethnic variants are extremely limited, even when compared with those between closely related Slavic languages (such as standard Czech and Slovak, Bulgarian and Macedonian), and grammatical differences are even less pronounced. More importantly, complete understanding between the ethnic variants of the standard language makes translation and second language teaching impossible’, leading the author ‘to consider it a pluricentric standard language’ (Šipka 2019: 166).

Since the South Slavic language situation is sometimes compared to the Scandinavian one, it should be noted that the mutual intelligibility between the standard varieties spoken in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia is at the highest level, meaning that it is significantly higher than between spoken standard Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Research conducted by the Nordic Culture Fund (*Nordiska kulturfonden*) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (*Nordiska*

ministerrådet) from 2002 to 2005 with native speakers of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish under the age of 25 showed that Copenhagen's youth understand only 36% of spoken Swedish and 41% of spoken Norwegian; Oslo's youth understand 71% of spoken Swedish and 65% of spoken Danish; Stockholm's youth understand 55% of spoken Norwegian and 34% of spoken Danish (Delsing and Lundin-Åkesson 2005: 65).²

In sociolinguistics, there is a term for a language like English or German: it is a pluricentric (or polycentric) standard language, which means a language spoken by several nations in several states, with recognizable variants (Glück 2000: 535; Clyne et al. 2003: 95). Each nation or state is one center, providing a distinctive national standard variety. The national standard varieties do differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, spelling, but they are mutually intelligible and therefore considering them as different languages would not be justified (Bußmann 2002: 521–522).³ English is a pluricentric language, German as well, Spanish, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Hindu-Urdu, Malay and many others (Clyne 1992). The language spoken in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia is also a pluricentric language, with four centers and four national varieties (Brozović 1992: 347–380; Mørk 2002: unpaginated in Preface; Bunčić 2008: 93; Zanelli 2018: 20–21; Pennington 2021: 125).⁴ That is not really disputable: 'Linguistic scientists are agreed that BCSM is essentially a single language with four different standard variants bearing different names' (Trudgill 2017: 46).

Describing a language as pluricentric is not something new, because the sociolinguistic theory of pluricentric languages emerged in the 1960s, when it was applied in various parts of the world to the description of the Spanish national varieties and English national varieties (Ammon 1995: 42–49). It is interesting that at that time, the most prominent Croatian linguists applied it to the description of the Serbo-Croatian language (Babić 1964; Brozović 1965; Jonke 1968–1969: 131). The theory was commonly accepted among South Slavic linguists for decades, until the 1990s. Since then, the theory of pluricentric languages as a sociolinguistic adequate way of describing the domestic language situation has been silenced because of nationalism.⁵

Nationalist ideology wants to convince people that the four peoples are crucially different in origin, history, language, etc. and therefore must be separated from each other. To implement the separation even in schools, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is used. The segregation of schoolchildren takes place in the name of minority language rights, although the Charter reads that a minority language must be different from the official language and must not be a dialect of the official language, and although the standard language of Bosniaks, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs is based on the same dialect called Shtokavian (Laškova 2001: 20; Blum 2002: 134; Babić 2004: 150; Brozović 2005: 194; Mørk 2008: 295), it is clear that according to the Charter it cannot be regarded as several minority languages.

For example, Croats and Serbs are still segregated in the city Vukovar. The divisions are obvious in the city two and a half decades after the war (Matić 2018). Nowhere is the policy of ethnic division more starkly apparent than in the school

system, where classrooms are divided along ethnic lines on the pretext of different languages. The political representative of the Serbian minority in the Croatian Parliament justifies segregation by claiming that ‘education in the minority language and script has no alternative because language and script are key components of any national identity’ (Kožul 2021). Children attend the same school, have the same teachers, and yet they barely know each other as they do not go to class together. One group attends school in the morning, the other in the afternoon. Youths are being prevented from meeting and spending time together. Separate classes, separate preschools, ethnicity-specific radio stations and even cafes (Matić 2018). The goal is to constantly reproduce nationalism as the political parties that are in power in Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina came to power by means of nationalism. By reproducing nationalism they reproduce their voters. Ethnic segregation suits them quite well, as it solidifies ethnic divisions and breeds fear and mistrust (Hadžiristić 2017).

The Case of Serbia

In Serbia, more than 20 minorities exist, among which are Bosniaks, Croats, and Montenegrins (Rezultati popisa 2013). Under the accord on the rights of minorities in Europe that Serbia signed on to, and a subsequent national law, there have been separate Croatian classes in primary and secondary schools since 2002, on the pretext of different languages (HINA 2018a, 2018b).

Bosniaks, who are the third largest of the minorities in Serbia, followed suit (Rezultati popisa 2013). They live mainly in the southwestern region of Serbia known as Sandžak. In 2013, primary and secondary schools in Sandžak have started dividing classes along ethnic lines. Bosniak students are taught in separate classrooms, on the pretext of speaking a different language, even though, in 2004, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) released a statement that ‘the Mission does not support a division of the society along ethnic lines on the basis of claims that refer to the right to learn one’s mother tongue’ (OSCE Belgrade Mission 2004). In 2005, the International Crisis Group wrote in a report that separate classrooms ‘will cause students to divide further on the basis of religion and ethnicity. The result will be further polarisation and self-imposed ethnic apartheid, as Serbs attend one set of classes and Bosniaks another’ (International Crisis Group 2005: 31). It ‘is rapidly undermining peaceful coexistence in Sandžak’. The same report reads that ‘Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins all speak a common tongue with several dialects and numerous sub-dialects, which have always been regionally, not ethnically, based. . . . Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins need no interpreters’ (International Crisis Group 2005: 30).

The Case of Bosnia-Herzegovina

Since the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina is composed of three constitutive ethnicities – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – none of them has the status of a minority in the state. In the 1990s, the war between them led to children being educated with

different curricula and textbooks based on their ethnicity and religion. The educational system in Bosnia-Herzegovina is described as 'probably one of the least functional ones in the world' (Brkan and Dajanović 2015). In a country with only 3.5 million inhabitants, there are as many as 13 Ministries of Education and at least twelve different curricula. Severely divided jurisdictions enable extreme autonomy in curriculum making, with much room for the influence of political ideologies, which leads to problems and anomalies, among which the so-called 'two schools under one roof' case is an important one (Brkan and Dajanović 2015). In practice, this means that children from different ethnic groups attend classes in the same building, but physically separated from each other on the pretext of speaking different languages (Sito-Sučić 2017). Some schools have fences preventing students socializing even during the breaks between classes (Surk 2018).

Students in Bosnia-Herzegovina have been protesting against the segregation for years, warning that it increases inter-ethnic hatred (Augustinović 2017). There is a documentary about 'two schools under one roof', made in 2009 by the German non-governmental organization *Schüler helfen leben*, which was formed in the early 1990s, when German students started a project for students in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war.⁶ Today, the organization is still supporting secondary school students throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. The High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE and other international organizations strongly support inclusive educational reforms (A Vision of Unity 2018). The Office of the High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina, a body charged with maintaining peace, has tried to unite the educational system, but with little success (Brkan and Dajanović 2015).

Ambassador Bruce Berton, Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina says: 'Since the war, the country's education system has been characterized by division and segregation, with the vast majority of children learning separately according to 'their' ethno-national group. This does not promote the values of a democratic society, respect for diversity or reconciliation. On the contrary, it entrenches divisions along ethnic lines. Furthermore, segregated education deprives the children of this country from receiving quality education free from political, religious, cultural and other biases' (A Vision of Unity 2018).

Japan's Efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Given that segregation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is unjustified and expensive, more expensive than improving the quality of the education, Japan started the Project on Informatics Curriculum Modernization at the Gymnasium of the city Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2006. This Gymnasium segregates students by ethnicity, so that children of Croatian and Bosniak ethnicity never attend classes together. Based on informatics textbooks used in Japanese high schools, Japan developed new textbooks written in the local language, allowing both Bosniak and Croat students to take the same informatics classes under the same curriculum (Japan's Official 2012). In this way, informatics classes became the only subject where students of different ethnicities were studying together in the same classroom at Mostar

Gymnasium. Japan donated all the equipment for the classroom and all public buses in the city.

In 2008, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) started another phase of the Project on Informatics Curricula Modernization in Bosnia-Herzegovina, expanding it to 18 secondary schools from across the country. Referring to Japanese high school textbooks, teachers of Bosnia-Herzegovina worked together to develop new textbooks for informatics. In next phase, in 2010, JICA supported development of common informatics curricula for gymnasia of all ethnicities (Homma 2010). Since good teachers are essential for learning, JICA held seminars for teachers in charge of informatics at gymnasia in Bosnia-Herzegovina and even invited school teachers from Bosnia-Herzegovina to Japan for training (Homma 2010). JICA says on its website that one of the important steps in improving the peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic and religious factions is to educate all children of Bosnia-Herzegovina with the same curricula and textbooks regardless of ethnicity (Homma 2010).⁷

Efforts of South Slavic Intellectuals Issuing the Declaration on the Common Language

Another attempt to end the segregation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia is a *Declaration on the Common Language* in 2017. It was issued by a group of intellectuals and non-governmental organizations from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, working on a project called *Language and Nationalism*. Before any public presentation, the Declaration has been signed by over two hundred prominent scientists, writers, journalists, activists and other public figures from the four countries (Trudgill 2017: 46). After being published, it received a warm welcome from ordinary people (Milekić 2017) and made headlines all over the region (Derk 2017: 6–7; Tripunovski 2017: 30; Potpišite ako 2017; Pročitajte tekst 2017; Deklaraciju o 2017). Some linguists from abroad have signed too (i.e., Greville Corbett, Ronelle Alexander, John Frederick Bailyn, Anders Ahlqvist, Spiros Moschonas, Camiel Hamans, Joachim Mugdan, Costas Canakis, James Joshua Pennington) (Lista potpisnika). The British sociolinguist Peter Trudgill notes that ‘linguists are well represented on the list of signatories’ (Trudgill 2017). Noam Chomsky has also signed the Declaration (Vučić 2018; Krajišnik 2018).

The Declaration is seen as an attempt to stimulate a more rational public discussion on language (Is Serbo-Croatian 2017) as it states that Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs and Montenegrins have ‘a common standard language of the polycentric type – one spoken by several nations in several states, with recognizable variants, such as German, English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese and many others. This fact is corroborated by Štokavian as the common dialectal basis of the standard language, the ratio of same versus different in the language, and the consequent mutual comprehensibility’ (Pročitajte tekst 2017). Taking into account the irrational fear that a common language could jeopardize the existence of a separate nation or state, the Declaration emphasizes that the common polycentric language ‘does not question the individual right to express belonging to different nations, regions or states’.

Finally, the Declaration provides a clear critique of the negative consequences of current language policy: 'Insisting on the small number of existing differences and on the forceful separation of the four standard variants causes numerous negative social, cultural and political phenomena. These include using language as an argument justifying the segregation of schoolchildren in some multi-ethnic environments, unnecessary 'translation' in administration or the media, inventing differences where they do not exist, bureaucratic coercion, as well as censorship (and necessarily also self-censorship)' (Pročitajte tekst 2017).

The Declaration is also viewed as an attempt to counter nationalistic divisions (Milekić 2017) and to contribute to the reconciliation process (Is Serbo-Croatian 2017), as it calls for 'abolishing all forms of linguistic segregation and discrimination in educational and public institutions' (Pročitajte tekst 2017). It advocates 'the freedom of individual choice and respect for linguistic diversity' (Pročitajte tekst 2017).⁸ As might be expected, some domestic politicians with a nationalist agenda expressed dissatisfaction with the Declaration (Milekić 2017), but some other politicians of different nationalities signed the Declaration (Lista potpisnika).

Conclusion

As shown in this chapter, there is a large discrepancy between the linguistic reality and the language politics and relevant legislation in South Slavic countries. On the one hand, according to all criteria, the linguistic reality can be described as a typical pluricentric standard language with four standardized varieties. On the other hand, schoolchildren are being segregated in Bosnia-Herzegovina as if they speak different languages. In Croatia and Serbia, segregation takes place in the name of minority language rights, ignoring that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages gives a clear definition of a minority language that excludes the term 'minority language' in this case.

There have been attempts for years to end the segregation. A few months after the publication of the Declaration on the Common Language, representatives of all secondary school students from Bosnia-Herzegovina protested in front of the Parliament building in Sarajevo against language-based segregation and managed to prevent the opening of a new school that was supposed to implement segregation (FENA 2017; Sokolović 2017). In November 2018, the OSCE gave an international award to students who staged protests and succeeded in stopping the proposed ethnic segregation of a school in the Bosnian town of Jajce (Srednjoškolci iz Jajca 2018).

There are also attempts by some Bosnian politicians to end language-based segregation. This is expected because a dozen Bosnian parliamentarians, including the vice president of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, signed the Declaration, which calls for the abolition of language-based segregation (Lista potpisnika). One of the signatories of Croatian ethnicity became the president of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the next elections (Komšić: Vjeran 2018). After the publication of the Declaration, the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina drafted a Bill amending the Framework Law on primary and secondary education in Bosnia-Herzegovina,

with the aim of ending language-based segregation, and organized roundtables throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina to publicly discuss the Bill (SDP predstavio 2017).

In 2018, in a proposal for an informal document, the Stabilization and Association Council between the European Union and Bosnia-Herzegovina called for the abolition of ‘two schools under one roof’ in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Karabegović 2018). In July 2021, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina found that ‘two schools under one roof’ were discriminatory (Augustinović and Milojević 2021). Commenting on the Constitutional Court’s ruling, the competent Minister of Education said that a different practice is not possible: ‘If we want to guarantee the right of every child to attend classes in their mother tongue, at this moment it is inevitable that two schools will be in one school building, because we don’t have enough school buildings’ (Augustinović and Milojević 2021). This is an example of how in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia ‘linguistic human rights discourse, despite its conscious goal of preventing discrimination, has actually helped legitimize ethnic divisions’ (Pupavac 2006: 113). Nevertheless, it is obvious that the process of deconstructing the existing situation has begun, and the Declaration on the Common Language played a role in this, as it managed to acquaint the general public with the (socio)linguistically based description of the language.

Notes

- 1 Only in Montenegro, there is no such segregation of schoolchildren.
- 2 In the Slavic area, there is one instance of a significant asymmetric intelligibility: Slovenians understand Croats better (79.4%) than Croats understand Slovenians (43.7%) (Gooskens et al. 2017: 183).
- 3 For more on mutual intelligibility and why it is the primary (socio)linguistic criterion separating different languages from varieties of a language, see Gröschel (2009: 132–151). For more on the measurement of mutual intelligibility, see Casad (1974), Ammon (1987: 325), Gooskens (2013), Gooskens and van Heuven (2017) and Gooskens et al. (2017).
- 4 For an analysis of various (socio)linguistic criteria involved in that issue, see Kordić (2004, 2007, 2010: 77–168).
- 5 Zanelli (2018) describes how the Croatian linguistic journal *Jezik* often holds views of language nationalism, denies the existence of a common language and uses metaphors to manipulate readers.
- 6 The documentary has English subtitles and can be viewed on YouTube (Documentary 2009).
- 7 In the whole region of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), Japan has provided assistance on consolidation of peace, economic development, and regional cooperation in accordance with the conclusions of the Ministerial Conference on Peace Consolidation and Economic Development of the Western Balkans, which was held jointly by Japan and the EU in 2004 (Japan’s Official 2012).
- 8 For an analysis of reactions to the Declaration on the Common Language, see Kordić (2019).

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